

New offensive being prepared against Boeing machinists

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Last month, over 33,000 machinists in Washington State and Oregon rejected an attempt by Boeing to extort deep concessions in return for “keeping jobs” in Washington State. The vote of 67 percent against the proposed contract changes was a debacle for the union, which had secretly negotiated the agreement and urged its passage.

Since the rebellion of the workers, there has been a concerted union effort led by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) to either convince Boeing to keep production of its newest jet in Washington from among 14 other possible sites, or resume negotiations on another contract extension. The aim of the unions is to find a new way to push through the attack on Boeing workers.

An alliance of the six unions calling itself the Coalition of Labor Unions at Boeing (CLUB) issued an open letter late last month stating that “we are ready to meet the challenge of designing and manufacturing the 777X on time, within budget and without growing pains.”

In addition to the IAM, the open letter was signed by the International Association of Fire Fighters, the International Union of Operating Engineers, the Teamsters, the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, and the Security, Police, Fire Professionals of America. It seeks to exploit a call by the president of Emirates Airline to build the plane in the US in order to avoid delays and construction difficulties similar to that which plagued the 787 Dreamliner. Emirates Airline recently ordered 150 of Boeing’s 777X planes.

Boeing Corporation, the largest airplane manufacturer in the world, had demanded that workers sacrifice their company-paid pension, accept higher health care costs, wage increases below the rate of inflation, and a no-

strike clause in a contract that would last until 2024. New-hires would have to work 16 years instead of six to reach top scale pay.

Boeing had previously received an \$8.7 billion tax cut from Washington State, the largest such subsidy for any corporation within the US. The Democratic governor and legislature quickly approved a package of 11 tax breaks, citing Boeing’s threats to move production out of state.

The days before the rejection of the contract saw angry denunciations by machinists on social media, including on the Facebook page of the union local, of Tom Wroblewski, president of Local 751 of the IAM, and International President Tom Buffenbarger. Union representatives were confronted by angry workers who were tearing up the contract summary that was being distributed.

Workers were threatened by corporate executives, the union, and state and local politicians, who declared that nearly 20,000 jobs would be lost if the contract was rejected. Boeing had stated that without a new deal “all bets are off” as to the location of final assembly and wing production of the new version of the 777.

After workers rejected the concessions, Wroblewski and IAM International Aerospace Coordinator Mark Johnson, who negotiated the sellout deal with Boeing, were forced to flee a union hall amidst angry boos and taunts.

Boeing has aggressively decentralized production out of the Puget Sound area. In 2009, it completed purchase of a non-union assembly and installation facility in South Carolina. Internal Boeing memos admitted that despite years of delays and billions in costs, locating outside of the two major assembly sites in Washington would give the company “leverage” over its workforce.

That the IAM is quite prepared to resume

negotiations with Boeing is made clear in a recent “message from the president” posting on District 751’s web page. Noting that he had met with Democratic Governor Jay Inslee, Wroblewski said, “The politicians want to preserve jobs in Washington, and they want us to keep talking with Boeing.” Wroblewski restricted pro-forma denials that talks are taking place with Boeing to his own involvement, saying, “I have not been involved in any talks that would lead to a new offer.” If talks are taking place, Boeing will still be demanding deep concessions and making it plain to the IAM that its job is to sell the deal.

At the same time, the IAM is afraid that the rebellion by the rank and file against the contract might take root and develop into an organized opposition to the union. That is the source of Wroblewski’s remarks in the November issue of *751 Aero Mechanic*, where he writes, “There have been a lot of harsh words spoken over the past few weeks, as we debated Boeing’s offer. Long-time friends... found themselves bitterly arguing on opposite sides.” He goes on to say, “This shared commitment that binds us together must be stronger than any lingering resentments that could drive us apart.”

As part of the effort to refurbish the IAM in the face of a growing rebellion against it, Socialist Alternative’s Kshama Sawant, recently elected to the Seattle City Council, was invited to speak at a rally last month, ostensibly in support of Boeing workers. In reality, the purpose of the rally was to bolster the tattered reputation of the union executives.

Sponsored by the Washington State Labor Council, the platform featured the very same politicians and union heads who had only days earlier championed the evisceration of the Boeing machinists’ rights.

In her election campaign, Sawant posed as a socialist in opposition to the two major parties and the capitalist system. However, her campaign was entirely conventional, and her main slogans were indistinguishable from those of many local Democratic Party operatives. As her intervention in the IAM dispute makes clear, her aim is to develop a new political framework for blocking the independent mobilization of the working class, which requires a break with the pro-corporate trade unions.

It is precisely an organized rank-and-file rebellion against the IAM, prepared to take charge of not only a

widespread industrial struggle against Boeing, but also a political struggle against the Democratic Party, that is needed. This requires the building of an independent political party of the working class committed to a socialist program, that is, the Socialist Equality Party.



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